

Devotions – November 15-21, 2015
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Sunday, November 15, 2015

Text: James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

I love that text! It was one that my grandparents cited frequently to remind me that God has gifted me with every good and perfect gift. They were truly one of God's gifts to me. I grew up with an older sister and two younger brothers. My dad, an orthopedic surgeon was hardly ever home; my mother was left to raise us virtually alone. My siblings were good in school, I wasn't. My early educational experience was trying. I was sinking academically, and it was my Dad's parents who came to my rescue.

Grandma and Grandpa were devout Baptists. Grandma was a Sunday School teacher, and Grandpa a deacon. Both were active in their faith; their Lord and His church came first in their lives. It was Grandma who tutored me in my studies, and read me Bible stories till I fell asleep at bedtime. It was Grandpa who taught me to recognize, appreciate and cultivate my gifts. Between the two of them, they mentored me in my budding Christian faith. Right before she died, my Grandma told my mother that I would be a pastor of the church. It was Christmas time in 1962; I was fifteen years old.

They mentored me by living a Christian life. They cherished the gifts God had given them and used them to praise him by the way they lived. They cited the text from James to teach me that who I am is God's gift to me. That God has gifted me with life – my time in this world; my talents or gifts: the abilities I have to make my way the world; and, my treasure which is a reflection of the ways I used my talents. They were very generous people, helping where they could help, feeding when they could feed someone in need, and giving money to support the work of their church family. I rejoice for the way they modeled for me the Christian life.

Over the next week, I want to share with you my thoughts and remembrances of them and the impact their mentoring continues to have on my life. Not a day goes by that I don't think of them and how they taught me to treasure and share God's good and gracious gifts to me. I hope these devotions are helpful for you as you rejoice in all God has given to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let Us Pray:

Father in heaven, you have blessed each of us in many and varied ways. Help us through the Spirit to recognize our gifts and use them to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Monday, November 16, 2015

Text: Romans 12:6-8

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

As I shared with you yesterday, I was mentored in my faith by my grandparents. Their mentoring included encouraging me to use my talents. They taught that my gifts are from God, and, that he expects that I will use them to earn a living and help others. They taught me that by example.

They believed that there are two ways to use one's gifts or talents: within the church family, and in the community at large. Grandpa was a tool and die maker and a master cabinet maker. He made beautiful furniture and clocks. When his church needed new deacon's chairs for the chancel area, he volunteered - created, at his expense, a set of seven deacon's chairs for the chancel area of his church. Each chair was a work of art made from black cherry with hand carved arms and backs. Grandma, a teacher and a piano teacher, used her teaching talents to teach Sunday school, play the piano for the openings and taught piano to children who wanted to learn. They gave of their talents free of charge because using them was their 'thanks be to God for all that he had done for them.'

Their lesson so impressed me that I spent thirty plus years giving back to the congregations I served and communities in which I lived by serving as a volunteer fireman and EMT, and Little League coach. I like to think that they would approve of the way in which I used my talents – gifts. How do you use your gifts-talents?

Let Us Pray:

Heavenly Father, you have truly gifted us with wondrous things. Help us to understand that your gifts are meant to be used for the help and edification of others in our church families. Through the Spirit, help us to joyfully use our gifts to grow our church family's ministry. Amen.



Tuesday, November 17, 2015

Text: Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Paul teaches that we are created in Christ for good works. Hmm! We can get into a long, complicated and probably boring debate about good works. But, suffice it to say that good works are our thanks be to God for all that he has done and accomplished in our lives. They are our "Amen" for the gifts that God has given.

When I was ordained, I sought a way to get involved in the communities where we lived. When I began my second call, a "narrow miss" hunting incident helped make up my mind. I knew that if

someone been injured, we would have been in trouble because we had no first aid kit, no telephone to call for help, no medical training, and the two closest hospitals were miles away. When I got home, Jane suggested I look into EMT training. I took the class and passed the Indiana state exam and joined our local fire department as an EMT/Firefighter - a childhood dream come true! In 2010, as I retired from EMS having served thirty years, I knew that that was how God wanted me to serve others in a way that was at one and the same time a reflection of my ministry.

Giving because there is a need is what I was taught. I became the recipient of such giving a few weeks ago when our 'adopted' nephew presented me with my completely revamped utility trailer. He knew I really needed a functioning trailer. When he asked me about it, and what I thought needed to be done, I told him a complete remake with a drive on ramp. With a smile, he said, "Sure, I can do that!" So he and his fiancée Dorothy loaded it onto a trailer and hauled it home. After three weeks, he presented me with what looked like a band new trailer complete with new paint job, new wood floor cover with steel plate, new wood sides and a drive on ramp. Flabbergasted beyond words and worried that this remake would be more than I could afford, I asked how much I owed him for this amazing transformation. He smile and said, "Nothing!" "After all that you and Aunt Jane have done for me, this is the least I could do." WOW!

As I read Paul and look back to my grandparents mentoring, I realize that God's hand was in my decision to serve as an EMT just as it was in becoming a pastor. It was in Dennis as he, out of the goodness of his heart, chose to use his talents to help restore my trailer. God's gifts are to be used to help others, my mentors counseled. I pray that my serving was a 'thanks be to God' for his good and gracious gifts to me. What is your "thanks be to God?"

Let Us Pray:

Heavenly Father, you call us into service through the gospel. Help us to serve as Jesus served by reaching out to others using your gifts to us. Amen.



Wednesday, November 18

Text: Proverbs 16:9

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

I cannot tell you how many times I've said, "I don't have the time." I'll bet you've probably said that or something similar. Time is a precious commodity in our lives because it's finite. We have just so many days, hours, minutes and seconds before we're called home. How we use our time is important.

My mentors always pointed out that I 'wasted time'. Their idea of wasting time was watching TV, putting around doing things that were of no account. Grandpa would say, do something constructive, apply yourself – use your abilities. He encouraged, "Make something, do something for someone, help someone who needs help." I didn't like that. I liked watching TV and didn't like being reminded that it was a waste of time.

Living within blocks of the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan, we received unbelievable amounts of snow every winter. Dad would pay me to shovel snow. My pay was a new plastic model in the spring. Hmmm, if Dad would pay me, maybe our neighbors would, too, I thought. So, when the next storm struck, armed with my shovel, off I went to find some business. My first customer was an elderly doctor who lived down the street from us. I saw him trying to deal with the 24 inch plus snow and asked if I could help. He said, "SURE!" A couple hours later when I finished the job, he paid me ten dollars – a lot of money back then. As I walked away thinking about how grateful he had been, I felt guilty. On impulse, I turned around, crept up to his back door and put the money in his milk chute and walked home feeling great.

When I told my grandpa what I had done, he just smiled and said, "Good job!" Grandpa said when you use your time helping others, that is when God smiles. I hope he smiles on all that we do in his name.

Let Us Pray

You know us better than we know ourselves. Establish our steps so that our time is wisely spent helping others. Amen.



Thursday, November 19, 2015

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

I love that text as I expect most of you do. There is indeed a time for everything under heaven. But 'making time' is difficult in the fast-paced world we live in. My daily schedule was packed when under call. Gone by 7:30 am, running all day long, home late in the evening. A few hours of sleep and the whole process repeated itself, day after day. 'Home time' included a quick meal with family before bed and the new day. Is that what your day is like?

My mentors, living in a different time, still lived busy lives. But, in their business, they never forgot to spend 'quality' time with each other. Each new day began with morning devotions and prayer before breakfast. Each meal was enjoyed at the kitchen table following prayer (not in front of the TV or video game). Each evening the day ended with a vesper service, grandpa reading scripture and offering a prepared homily and grandma sitting at the old upright piano playing familiar hymns. What togetherness that was – Grandma, Grandpa and God.

I am chagrined to say that I forgot that happy time. Family is a gift of God. I rediscovered how important and rewarding it was to spend time with Jane and our sons. Little things like playing board games, occasionally enjoying a small impromptu food fight, coaching Little League, or

just playing catch in the back yard was heart-warming and fun! Peter and Joel are now fathers, and they enjoy spending time with their families. From what they tell me, and from what I observe, I see they rejoice always in the precious gift God has given them.

Let Us Pray

Heavenly Father we are all too aware of how quickly time passes us by. Help us to spend time with those we love. Amen.



Friday, November 20, 2015

Text: Matthew 6:19-21

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

During this week, I've talked about two of the three gifts that I have been contemplating: gifts that I am grateful for and yet take for granted: time and talents. My mentors would be horrified to hear me say that because they always counseled live each day grateful for all God has given and done for you through Jesus Christ. The third gift, albeit, not a 'true' gift but a benefit of the gifts we have been given, is critically important for lives. It is money!

As a young pastor in the first year of my first call, the President of the Ohio Synod, Rev. Ken Sauer required all new pastors to attend a LLM Stewardship Workshop. It was during that workshop that a new concept about money was presented. Rev. Cal Gilck, a workshop leader, defined money as 'congealed sweat.' He held up a dollar bill and said it represented the 'sweat of our brows'. For using our time and talents, we are paid with money. Hmm. I never thought of it that way. I'm paid for using the gifts that God has given. Interesting isn't it? God gives the gifts, we use them, and receive money for using them. That's good if that's as far as it goes. But, it goes further.

Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." I have the tendency to be very possessive about money. How about you? Jesus is concerned here with how we use our treasure – money. I can hoard it, jealously guard it and use it only for what I want, and, if I do, I reveal where my heart is. But, if I use it wisely, I have money to pay my bills and still help those in need. When I do that, it becomes obvious where my heart is. My mentors always counseled that you do not waste money but use it wisely to pay your bills and help others. If I use it only for myself, my heart will be squirreled away with my money only to be revealed when I use the money. Hmm. Thought provoking isn't it?

Let Us Pray

Father in heaven, you have given me good and precious gifts for which I am paid money. Through your Son's Spirit, teach me how to use money wisely to your glory. Amen.



Saturday, November 21, 2015

Text: Acts 11:29-30 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁹*The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers^[a] living in Judea;* ³⁰*this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

Following up on yesterday, I'm still pondering the understanding that money is the reflection of using God's gifts. It's hard work earning money, therefore, it doesn't make sense to throw it away. Jane and I wrestle frequently trying to decide where and to whom we will give our money. We discuss it and decide together how to use it. It is a joint effort as together we give back to God what he has given us.

My mentors reminded me regularly of what Paul said about money in 1 Timothy 6:10, that "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil ..." David, they would say, your money is yours, you earned it, and you can spend it on anything you desire, but, how you use your money speaks volumes of your priorities. That's scary, isn't it? Someone once said, show me your checkbook index and I'll show you where your heart is. How I use money is testament to how I view life. If the index is all about 'me', then life is all about 'me.' If that's the case, where is Jesus?

Our text from Acts reminds us that the early church took an offering to help the church in Jerusalem that was in need. The church wasn't wealthy, but it was not as needy as the Jerusalem church. So Paul gathered an offering, and together with Barnabas, took that offering to Jerusalem. They used their money to help those in need. Their heart was with their brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem because that was where the greater need. Together they sent their money and their hearts to those in need. Where do we send our treasure?

Let Us Pray

Loving God, through Jesus you gave us loving and generous hearts. Help us always to be generous with money, so that those in need may receive our hearts and our prayers. Amen.

